

JOURNALS DECLINE RESEARCH FUNDED BY TOBACCO FIRMS

As of Dec. 1, medical journals published by the American Thoracic Society (ATS), the scientific arm of the American Lung Association, no longer carry research conducted with funds from the tobacco industry. The *Washington Post* said the move is believed to mark the first time a medical journal has instituted an across-the-board ban on research solely because of the source of funding.

ATS officials said they felt morally compelled to dissociate the society from the industry because of tobacco's links to lung disease. However, this view is not shared by all medical publishers and researchers; in 1994, the *Post* said, the Council for Tobacco Research, funded by tobacco companies, distributed more than \$19.5 million (US) to scientists. In the same year, researchers who had received tobacco-industry grants published 375 scientific papers in a variety of journals.

CMA WELCOMES PROPOSED AD BAN

A month before Canada observed National Non-Smoking Week (Jan. 15–21), the CMA welcomed Health Minister Diane Marleau's proposal for a complete ban on tobacco advertising. The health minister released a plan for tough legislation that would ban tobacco advertising and severely restrict tobacco-com-

pany sponsorship of the arts and sporting events.

Dr. Jack Armstrong, the CMA president, called the blueprint a "good first step in addressing the legislative gap surrounding tobacco." He said the CMA supports the ban and the introduction of tough regulations governing product displays in stores that sell tobacco products. "We now look forward to the prompt introduction of comprehensive tobacco legislation — including measures to regulate the manufacture of tobacco products."

The tobacco industry immediately responded by saying it would abandon its self-imposed and voluntary moratorium on advertising, which it had observed since a September Supreme Court ruling that struck down sections of the Tobacco Products Control Act regulating advertising. Up to that point the industry had not invoked its right to resume advertising. Arts and sporting groups also expressed concern about restrictions on lucrative tobacco industry sponsorship.

POPULARITY OF CMA ONLINE SOARS

The number of "hits" on *CMA Online*, the CMA's site on the Internet's World Wide Web, grew exponentially in the fall. By late November the weekly number of accesses of the several thousand files at the site <http://www.hwc.ca:8400/infobase/> had surpassed 11 500, quadruple the average when the service was launched last spring.

A distinct peak appeared each week that a new edition of *CMAJ* went online. The most popular part of *CMA Online* continues to be the Infobase, which contains a variety of online publications, including the online editions of *CMAJ* and the *Canadian Association of Radiologists Journal*, the totally online newsletter *Canadian Bioethics Report*, a collection of clinical practice guidelines abstracts and several online monographs, including *Counselling Guidelines for HIV Testing*.

IG NOBEL WINNERS NAMED

Research on nostril breathing and a case report on foreign bodies in the rectum were among the "winners" of the 1995 Ig Nobel Prizes presented in October at Harvard University. *Scientific American* reported last month that the "Ig" for medicine went to researchers who published "The effects of unilateral forced nostril breathing on cognition" in the *International Journal of Neuroscience*. A report that was defeated in the medicine category, "Rectal foreign bodies: case reports and a comprehensive review of the world's literature" (published in *Surgery*), managed to claim the Ig in literature. It documented items, including a magazine, that had been removed from patients' rectums.

In the Public Health category, the winner was a Scandinavian study entitled "Impact of wet underwear on thermoregulatory responses and thermal comfort in the cold", pub-

lished in *Ergonomics*. One of the more tasteless awards was the Ig in Nutrition, which went to the company that created Luak Coffee — the most expensive in the world. It is made from beans ingested and excreted by the luak, a bobcat-like native of Indonesia. The Igs are awarded annually to "individuals whose achievements cannot or should not be reproduced." Sponsors include the *Annals of Improbable Research*.

PLAN WOULD WIPE OUT MEASLES IN ONTARIO

The Ontario government has decided to immunize an entire generation against measles in an effort to wipe out the spread of the disease in the province. Between February and the end of June, more than 2 million schoolchildren — most of whom had a first dose after their first birthday — will receive a second dose of measles vaccine. A news release from the Ministry of Health says a second dose protects almost 100% of immunized children. Following this initiative, a second dose of measles vaccine will be required for all children entering school in Ontario.

HOSPITAL TO PUBLISH FRENCH EDITION OF MAYO CLINIC HEALTH LETTER

Saint-Luc Hospital of Montreal and the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research of Rochester, Minnesota, have agreed to develop a French-language edition of the *Mayo Clinic Health Letter*, with the first issue of *Info Santé Clinique Mayo* expected to appear next summer. The publication will be supervised by a team of physicians and research scientists led by Dr. Jean Robert, head of the Department of Preventive Medicine.

The newsletter, which carries no advertising, has 500 000 subscribers in more than 100 countries and is also published in German and Spanish. It deals with timely general-interest topics related to medicine and surgery, nutrition, exercise, lifestyle and mental health. The target audiences are patients aged 60 and older, people living in remote areas and doctors who may want to display waiting-room copies. An annual subscription to the French-language edition will cost \$35; for information call 514 281-2106, or write to the Saint-Luc Hospital Foundation, 1058 Rue St-Denis, Montréal QC H2X 3J4.

GUIDE TO STERILE SYRINGE CENTRES PUBLISHED

The Quebec government has taken its battle against AIDS to the street by publishing a list of 290 centres that provide sterile syringes to intravenous drug users. Many offer the syringes free of charge and also dispose of used syringes. The Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services created the directory in 1994 to make it easier for drug users to find sterile syringes, and the updated version includes 110 new locations. Physicians can obtain a list of centres by calling 514 527-2626 (Montreal) or 800 265-2626 (other parts of Quebec); (fax) 514 873-9997.

TELEMEDICINE COMES TO NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia is introducing a telemedicine pilot project to increase community-based medical services outside the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area. The pilot project will concentrate on radiology applications, transmitting medical data and video images between physicians.

The specialist consulting site will be the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax; Dalhousie University and the Cape Breton Regional Hospital will participate in continuing medical education. The project will work in conjunction with a new physician-recruitment program that is attempting to attract and retain doctors in rural areas.

RESTRUCTURING UNDER WAY AT AMA

Facing a challenge that should sound eerily familiar to Canadian physicians, the American Medical Association (AMA) is confronting the issue of restructuring to reflect better the present and future realities of the medical profession. An editorial in *AMNews*, published by the AMA, recently said that while 34 recent recommendations for change for the federation of organized medicine would prompt contentious and impassioned debate, the debate "should end decisively on the side of significant change, and the sooner the better."

The recommendations would make organized medicine in the US more representative of its members and more efficient as it works on their behalf, the editorial said. "While it is not pleasant to imagine a death spiral for organized medicine, it is not so difficult either. The AMA's membership market share has been slipping, and likewise for many state medical societies. It stands to reason that physicians in the future won't join organizations if they feel alienated and voiceless." An irrelevant AMA would suit health plan executives and government bureaucrats, the editorial said: "No one left to speak out for patients. No one left to speak out for doctors. No more nettlesome arguments about ethics, medical rights or fair reimbursement."